

# The Columbus Dispatch

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Opinion

## **Column: Relax: Green New Deal means practical innovations**

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The Green New Deal proposal introduced by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., and Sen. Ed Markey, D-Mass., has focused attention on the critical need to do something about climate change. Some critics think its goals are unrealistic and that it amounts to a government power grab. But the reality behind the Green New Deal is quite different.

More importantly, such a program can benefit Ohioans precisely because it is comfortably compatible with the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio initiative known as PowerForward: A Roadmap to Ohio's Electricity Future, released last August.

The Green New Deal did not originate with the Cortez-Markey proposal. The phrase was coined by columnist and author Thomas Friedman in his 2008 book "Hot, Flat and Crowded." The heart of Friedman's Green New Deal, as well as the new version, involves energy investments that can reduce the harmful effects of carbon emissions and advance the ongoing transition to a smarter energy economy — an economy that will greatly benefit from innovations in energy technologies, particularly through the development of an improved electricity infrastructure.

The primary goal of Ohio's PowerForward is to use energy innovation to enhance the experience of the state's electricity customers in several ways. An improved electric grid that serves as a platform to provide a variety of new services and products will increase competition in the electricity sector. The new platform also will expand consumer choice and encourage traditional utilities to develop new, innovative business models.

The new platform will require government officials to redesign how energy is regulated in the state. The energy future, then, is one based on technological, business and regulatory innovation. PowerForward encourages each of these developments.

The traditional electricity grid is a simple, one-way system in which electricity is provided to customers, who then pay for what they receive. The smart grid, with its smart technologies, will be a two-way system in which power and data flow back and forth between customers and electric-service providers. With better two-way communications, price signals to consumers will be more accurate, consumer choice will expand and energy planning can become more robust and reliable.

Additionally, an array of new technologies will be used to generate electricity while plugged into the smart grid. In addition to traditional resources like coal, natural gas and nuclear power, electricity can be produced by renewable resources like solar and wind.

Also, the electricity mix will increasingly incorporate energy-efficiency measures, such as programmable thermostats, that also enhance consumer choice and can lower utility bills.

PowerForward explicitly recognizes that the state's electricity system is becoming more decentralized. As consumers become electricity providers through rooftop solar, for example — and more involved with distribution through microgrids as another example — reliance on large-scale central power stations is reduced. With decentralization, reliability, resilience and cyber security can be improved.

Ready or not, our energy future is upon us and two emerging technologies will redefine the way we use and consume electricity across the board: Electric vehicles and improved energy storage are disruptive energy technologies that will affect all of us.

PowerForward recognizes and supports all of these developments and is currently planning for them. PUCO intends to design and operate an electricity network in which the smart grid becomes a platform for “limitless new technologies and services.” Not coincidentally, those new technologies and services will require new workers, thus creating new jobs.

So do not let the name Green New Deal alarm you. Ohio's PowerForward is already a step ahead of the energy curve as it aims to modernize and improve our electricity system through innovation to the benefit of Ohio's electricity consumers.

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